

## Roadmap to Revelation

It is not through striving that we are saved by the cross, but through surrender to God's will.

### 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 - Revised Standard Version

<sup>18</sup>For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart.”

<sup>20</sup>Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup>For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup>For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

### I. Go Ask The Mice

The tracker and author Tom Brown, Jr. tells a story about his childhood in the woods. He and his friend Rick wanted to see owls. Owls are cool. They are elusive predators, sometimes heard, but seldom seen. How were they to go about finding them? Where to look? When to look? The boys asked their mentor, Stalking Wolf, an Apache elder whom they called “Grandfather.” Grandfather considered for a moment and then told them, if you want to see owls, you should go and ask the mice.

The boys were not too crazy about that idea. They were expecting Grandfather's wisdom to be handed to them. They wanted to see owls immediately. They wanted a quick, easy solution. Besides, how do you ask mouse anything anyway? But Grandfather had been teaching them how to read and interpret animal tracks, so the boys got down on their bellies and spent weeks following mouse trails and observing how mice traveled, often under cover. They noticed what times of day the mice crept out from under foliage and debris to forage. They observed their trails and habits and learned that mice, who have a special aversion to owls, could give them a clear notion of where and when owls would be present in the forest.

After some time, the boys were able to know with great precision where and when to find owls, but they had gained the understanding in an unexpected way. They had gone to ask Grandfather because they wanted to be shown the signs and receive Grandfather's wisdom. Instead, they had received a question, which led them on a quest. And because they trusted Grandfather, that quest led them to an experience which offered them what they sought. They had to get down on their bellies in the dirt and dust to be able to see something high above their heads.

## II. The Old Order

Paul's letter to the Corinthians is a sort of like that. Paul's message is that the cross is foolishness to the world, but wiser than all the world's wisdom put together. To those who live solely in the awareness of the material world, with the fear death hanging over their heads, the cross is the symbol of everything they wish to reject. The cross was a symbol of terror, after all. Rome used it to impress upon the people their utter weakness in the face of state violence and domination. How then did it become a symbol of life, love and grace? How, in our limited human wisdom, can we hope to understand this seemingly upside down message? How can we hope to understand it any more than a mouse can understand a hydroelectric dam, or a mosquito read a roadmap?

God's ways are not our ways.

Paul writes: "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

This statement can be frustrating for those of us who like clear instruction. I like directions to be explained simply and I want to know where I'm going, how to get there and what to expect along the way. But that is not how God works with us. That is not what is required of us to have a relationship with God and experience God's kingdom. Paul offers us, not the world's wisdom, but revelation — a truth greater and more amazing than the truth we witness in the ways of the world.

## III. Asking for Signs

Paul says that the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks for wisdom. These are traditional methods for seeking direction. As we seek God in our lives and in the world, we may also look for signs and try to discern the truth through wisdom. However, Paul tells us that these old methods will not suffice.

In the last month, one of the most difficult things I had to do was to learn to drive in Eritrea. I'm used to roads having clear signs. I am used to being able to read street markings. I am used to knowing when to stop at a red light and yield and merge and so on. Here at home, the rules are clear to me and in most places I've been, directions on getting from one place to another are also clear. In Eritrea, I did not see one working traffic light. There were no lines in the middle of the road. I did not see one sign with a street name on it until our last day, and that sign was too small and faded for me to read while driving. Even if there were legible signs, I cannot read the Tigrinya alphabet. My general notion of seeking signs for direction went out the window. There was no roadmap either. Sometimes I got verbal directions, but often they were more

confusing than helpful. When I went for a drive, I had to accept the chance of getting lost and just go, with a sense that somehow I would get where I wanted to go. It all worked out, because here I am, but I could not go anywhere with my habitual notion of wanting clear signs. It was a physical experience of what Paul writes about in a spiritual sense.

#### **IV. Desiring Wisdom**

Having any clear signs on the road was one thing, but that was not the most difficult thing about driving in Eritrea. I had to share the road with pedestrians, bicyclists, horse drawn wagons, donkeys, camels, dogs, and on a couple of occasions, baboons. So the road was crowded, but except for a general sense of staying on the right side, no one, human or animal, followed any road rules that I could discern. Everyone just seemed to cross the road wherever and whenever. I am normally a defensive driver, but if I followed my normal notions of courtesy, I would right now still be sitting at an intersection in Asmara, waiting for a chance to pull into traffic, instead of standing here. I had to override my inherited cultural wisdom, my sense of road rules and manners, and just go. My old ways of doing things would simply not work there. I had to be very aware of everyone on the road and go slow when I needed to. But it is nothing anyone could have coached me on. I simply had to experience it and learn on the road. Incidentally, I did a lot of praying while I was behind the wheel.

My cultural wisdom could not help me with that experience. It did not apply to the unspoken rules of a culture that is very different from my own. This applies to other aspects of life. We inherit all kinds of wisdom from our culture based on social and economic principles. The ways we treat each other, how we go about our work and play and how we judge value all come down as aspects of cultural wisdom and nobody really wants to be, or appear to be, foolish. But Paul tells us that in God's kingdom, the realm of spirit, all of our wise notions are mere foolishness.

#### **V. Belief, Surrender and Revelation**

There is a sense in Paul's letter, that we don't get to where we want to go in our spirit life in a straight line, with a roadmap like any other roadmap we've seen. The journey of the spirit does cannot be guided merely by signs we receive from others, or wisdom we have inherited or sought after from culture. That is not how the spirit works. That is not how we have a personal relationship with God.

In this season of lent, as we approach the mystery of the cross, we **do** look to signs and we **do** study the wisdom we find in the Bible and from other teachers, and that is an important part of the search, but to seek the face of God, something that is beyond all human wisdom, there is no institution or prescribed pathway that we can follow, like some sort of diet regime to lose weight or a class we can take to learn a new language. We have to find a new way — a way of the spirit for a person of spirit.

One important element of prayer is surrender. Once we have asked God for something, I think that we must really let go of our own desir